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Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France: Marc Lescarbot and the New World Masque

The first theatrical production in North America, for which a script survives, was performed in Canada at Port Royal, Nova Scotia on 14 November 1606. Entitled *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France*, the play was written by the French explorer and man of letters Marc Lescarbot to celebrate the return of Champlain and Sieur De Poutrincourt from a late-summer voyage of discovery southward along the coast of Maine to Massachusetts. Reports of earlier dramatic activity by the Spanish exist—on St. John's day at Tequesta, Florida in 1567; and, on 30 April 1598, a comedy by Captain Marcos Farfan to mark the Spanish claim of New Mexico—but no scripts survive. The evidence for Spanish playing involves mentions, in the first instance in a letter, and in the second in an epic poem. In neither case is the drama itself a primary cultural artifact. But the French play by Lescarbot *is* a significant literary and cultural artifact: it represents a social interaction expressed in artistic form. In fact, *Le Théâtre de Neptune* celebrates an immediate sense of survival which sets it apart from the mutual comfort and ritualized praise of conventional European masques of the period. It is an exercise of power to be grasped immediately by French explorer and Micmac native alike, not a "removed mystery" of allegorization to be interpreted at length by courtiers. Thus Lescarbot's short composition is a dramatized myth that moves explorer and native together toward a celebration in which each culture appropriates the desirable and exploitable elements of the other. But there is never any doubt as to the dominant cultural ethic.

The French both create and benefit from this dramatized celebration of power.¹

The play was published as part of Lescarbot's appended "Muses de la Nouvelle-France," included in his larger work, *The History of New France* (1609).² As was customary for his day, the author apologized for his literary pretensions at the conclusion of his rhymes. He wrote them, he says, for two reasons: "*that they might contribute to our History in addition to showing that we lived joyously*" (43)—good reasons for a humanistic literary artifact. But the "joyousness" of the event is celebrated by Frenchmen acting as natives and thus coopting native participation. Their performance is directed *at* their native hosts as much as it is revelled in by themselves. And yet, even as spectators, the natives participate. The purpose: to demonstrate experience of and obedience to European cultural myth. Stephen Greenblatt postulates, "Europeans had, for centuries, rehearsed their encounter with the peoples of the New World, acting out, in their response to the legendary Wild Man, their mingled attraction and revulsion, longing and hatred." ("Learning to Curse" II, 566). Having already met and coexisted with the "Wild Man," however, these French sailors, through Lescarbot's play, reenact the encounter by enlarging their myth to absorb the Indians in mutual festivity: Neptune, followed by six Tritons and four Indians, welcomes Sieur De Poutrincourt back to Port Royal with promises of much ensuing revelry.

Of the playlet, Jack Warwick writes that *The Theatre of Neptune* was "obviously meant for fun, but the mock-pompous style seems also to contain a serious declaration of colonial ambitions for France" (Warwick 553). Lescarbot's masque "contains" much more: it is an inscribed historical and social moment, drawing on European and Native myth, poetry, spectacle, music, specific personality, even weather conditions combined with actual features of the outdoor landscape. And all is reconciled within the artistic and cultural hegemony of the European masque vision. With this aesthetic in mind, I plan to investigate the artistic and political features of *The Theatre of Neptune*—its sense of celebration, mythology, power, even its antimasque features—in conjunction with its rather untamed setting and Lescarbot's more prosaic observations of the "new world" in which he found himself in the late fall of 1606.

The Theatre of Neptune is usually mentioned in passing as a literary curiosity or cited as a piece of interesting historical trivia. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* is authoritative in its disclaimer:

The short text belongs more validly to French than Canadian literature, yet it contains a serious attempt to reproduce a New World setting, with its "Indian" roles and its scattering of words from native languages. The play is of the type known as a *réception*, long practised in France, composed to celebrate the visit or return of an important personage. (Forsyth 200; cf. Doucette, "Théâtre de Neptune")

But *The Theatre of Neptune* has consistently defied easy classification. Much as he would have liked to, Henry Carrington Lancaster in his *History of French Dramatic Literature*, could not place the play within the category "pastoral," referring to it instead as "a kind of pageant" (26). Lancaster Dabney included *The Theatre of Neptune* under the heading "Pageants and Parades" in his study, concluding: "It is not really a play but an outdoor pageant." (343). Both appraisals are under the sway (perhaps unconsciously) of the great French bibliographer Paul LaCroix, who listed the piece under an incorrect date and commented with mild scholarly vexation: "les sauvages parlent en français et les tritons en patois gascon, et sans doute la première importation de notre théâtre en Amérique" (I, 196; cf. Arbour). Leonard Doucette is more accurate and more considered in his appraisal of the piece as related to "the public masques and triumphal entries, the nautical extravaganzas and allegorical galas so integral to French (and English) courtly life" in the Renaissance (*Theatre* 7). Such public displays celebrate and reinforce Renaissance political power; and they do so here in Lescarbot's play. As Hannah Fournier reads it: "Lescarbot's entry was secular rather than religious in its focus, expressing the supremacy of the King's representative in New France over the forces, natural and political, with which he was confronted there" (3). This it does; and more. I argue that *The Theatre of Neptune* also celebrates a mutualized sense of power with specific sensitivity to time, place, circumstances and audience, as well as to a distinctly "new world" ethos.

Samuel de Champlain is the only contemporary critic: "Upon our arrival, Lescarbot, who had remained at the settlement, along with the others who had stayed there, welcomed us with sundry jollities for our entertainment" (Champlain I, 438; see also Morison, Armstrong).

Significantly, Champlain considered the show in terms of its variety as a homecoming. The French are already "settled" here, pre-empting Anton Wagner's declaration: "From a political point of view, *Théâtre de Neptune* claims the new world for France and announces the submission of its indigenous people to the rule of the white man" ("Nationalism" 23; see also Wagner, "Colonial Quebec"). Nearly the whole of the preceding century had been devoted to such claims through the voyages of, among others, de Gonneville, Thomas Aubert, and Cartier. Champlain himself had already crossed the Atlantic five times. Basque and Portuguese fishermen had long been taking cod from the waters off what is now Atlantic Canada as well as making contact and trading with the natives there. Natives had "visited" France, and French youths were soon to sojourn with the native North Americans, acquiring their language and customs. Consequently, by the time of Lescarbot, Poutrincourt, and Champlain, the natives no longer saw three-masted sailing vessels as floating islands with three trees; and Europeans were definitely not supernaturals. Nor were the bearded white men considered any longer to be bears in popular native mythology.³ The time for "announcement" had passed; the time for celebration and consolidation had come.

Francis Parkman's famous generalization is a significant starting point: "Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; English civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him" (I, 131). Hegemonic appropriation and absorption is the French colonial technique. French gardens have been planted, the coastline has been mapped, Christianity has already been imported. Natural forces are to be codified and controlled through the power of "civilized" fantasy, of dominant myth, of cultural and political assertion—this is the definition of power, and it is a definition grasped by French and Micmac alike. The early mimetic Catholicism of the Micmacs dovetailed quite nicely with their pre-contact spiritual and medical concerns: shamans and missionaries alike consulted supernatural forces for the purposes of healing; crucifixes and saints' bones possessed the same power as Micmac relics; and the mystical intimacy of baptism was clearly a pledge of friendship and cooperation. In fact, so powerful was the sacrament of baptism that the next century saw native shamans giving up the medicine bag in favor of consulting basins of water (Upton 32, Bailey 126-47). In all cases, aesthetic and political power is subsumed by the French through mutual representation.

The Theatre of Neptune is a post-contact document of artistic representation that contains a domestic, political and cultural message. The script itself is a historical circumstance performed by Europeans no longer naïve to the implications of their culture in a "new world." With one eye facetiously on the classics and another on immediate survival, Lescarbot describes the circumstances of his masque thus:

After many perils, which I shall not compare to those of Ulysses or of Aeneas, lest I stain our holy voyages amid such impurity, M. de Poutrincourt reached Port Royal on November 14th, where we received him joyously and with a ceremony absolutely new on that side of the ocean. For about the time we were expecting his return, whereof we had great desire, the more so that if evil had come upon him we had been in danger of a mutiny, I bethought me to go out to meet him with some jovial spectacle, and so we did. (*History*, II, 340-41)

The first thing to be understood about *The Theatre of Neptune*, then, is that its motivation is more than merely ceremonial. Its purpose is to "divert"—in both senses of deflected attention and entertaining amusement. The assured "newness" of this exercise is in its immediate sense of survival as well as its domesticated concern with entertainment, obedience, and cultural expression. The "new" is to be made familiar through inscription and performance. As Norman Grabo suggestively puts it "he [Lescarbot] has made the frontier literary and in doing so denied it any special resistance. The play makes danger, disorder, and strangeness sharable" (279). This it does, but not by elevating native themes to the status of ancient Greek and Roman myth. Instead, natives and explorers are subsumed within a new mythology: Neptune greets the indigenous people on their terms through his European celebrants. Lescarbot thus dramatizes Frenchmen as Indians as Frenchmen, where hegemonic cultural appropriation takes precedence over cultural invasion. The speaking roles are all French; the natives play their parts as audience and as new celebrants in the literal feast which follows under the auspices of the European myth. Interpretation here is an exercise in mutuality where meaning is grasped immediately by French participants and native audience.

The masque invokes and celebrates expansionist European ideology. Like all masques, *The Theatre of Neptune* is both Platonic and Machiavellian: in Stephen Orgel's definition, "Platonic because it presents

images of the good to which the participants aspire and may ascend; Machiavellian because its idealizations are designed to justify the power they celebrate" (*Illusion* 40). And the "newness" of Lescarbot's masque can be read against Orgel's further opinion: "It is characteristic of the kind of action masques present that it can take place only in a world purged of drama, of conflict"—in other words, in a new, a different, a transcendent world (*Jonsonian Masque* 17). New France may not be transcendent, but it is certainly new and different. For the French who had survived the dreadful previous winter, it is also a habitation of some dependability and comfort within newly familiar terrain and among unthreatening native people. The dominant ethic is thus a combination of discovery, endurance, and cultural supremacy where metaphysical speculation will involve the necessary participation of disparate cultures.

And mutual accommodation is the opening theme of the play:

NEPTUNE: Halt, Sagamos, stop here,
And behold a God who has care for you. (38)

Not only is Poutrincourt addressed by the Native honorific "Sagamos"—"an Indian word meaning Captain," as the text avers—but the usually tempestuous sea god offers care and harbor. Technically, the only true "sagamos" in attendance is Membertou, the famed Micmac chief and holy man. And yet the message here is clear: Poutrincourt is indeed a "sagamos," a new world captain with a sphere of influence that is being celebrated at this very moment of performance. Membertou, proud, charismatic, and self-confident, watches with the dispassionate interest of an accomplished diplomat. After all, his guest answers directly to the French King Henri IV, and Membertou, soon to be baptized "Henri" with the French King as his honorary Godfather, considers himself the equal of any European monarch. He even has an appropriate theatrical gesture to illustrate it. Lescarbot writes thus of Membertou in his *History*: "Being himself a Sagamos, he considers himself the equal of the King and of all his lieutenants, and often said to M. de Poutrincourt that he was his great friend, brother, companion, and equal, showing this equality by joining together the fingers of each hand which we call the index or pointing finger" (II, 355). In addition, as a social and spiritual leader, Membertou had doubtlessly included French words of power from the Catholic mass in his incantations, just as he would use French musketry and steel

arrowheads to rout his tribal enemies. Lescarbot even celebrates Membertou's victories in a poem, "La defaite des sauvages Armouchiquois," and muses further on the Chief's political situation in his *History*: "He has been a very great and cruel warrior in his youth and during his life. Therefore rumor runs that he has many enemies, and is well content to keep close to the French, in order to live in safety" (II, 354-5). To Poutrincourt, Membertou owes the gratitude of allegiance; to Membertou, Poutrincourt owes the gratitude of survival.

Within the masque, praise equals political assertion. This runs directly counter to present-day democratic ideals. But praise here is more than simple wish-fulfilment. It is the visual engagement of a powerful presence in which praise for the leader is the appropriate, unimpeachable, political prerogative. It represents a "power poetics" that goes beyond the symbolic religious aesthetic of lay priests, missionaries, and Christian healers to the conspicuous celebration of secular fictions. The masque thus celebrates as it asserts: enterprise, energy, discovery—these are lived virtues in contradistinction to social and political supposings. Neptune himself airs the congratulatory pledge:

I will always help you in your plans
 Because I do not want your efforts to be in vain,
 And because you have always had the courage
 To journey from so far away to explore this shore
 In order to establish a French domain here
 And have my status and my laws respected. (39)

The European god pledges favor, while the establishment of a "French domain"—"un Royaume François" in the original—makes clear the nature of the political importation as "under the mighty reign of Henry, your king" (39).

Neptune's greeting, recounting of his lineage, and promise of support for French enterprise in the new world seems to pick up from a poem composed by Lescarbot earlier in 1606:

Neptune, if e'er thou hast thy favour cast
 On those whose lives upon the waves are passed,
 Good Neptune, grant us what we most desire,
 Safe berth in a friendly port, so thine Empire
 May thereupon be known in countless regions
 And soon be visited by all the nations. ("Farewell" 51)

Here, in *The Theatre of Neptune*, the sea god promises to support Poutrincourt's civilizing mission and makes an earnest plea for French investment in the new world:

I swear by my sacred Trident, my sceptre,
That I will always support your enterprises.
And I will never rest
Until I see my waves in this area
Pant under the weight of ten thousand ships
Which in the twinkling of an eye do whatever you want. (39)

"Tout ce que tu desires" is the original, betraying both the relentlessness and the desire of French colonialism.

The "enterprises" of converting the natives and colonizing the land celebrate French expansionist ideals. Such initiatives are simultaneously justified in themselves as ideals to be sought within a world that is perceived as "new." And the province of the masque is located within the ideal. This production is at the outer reaches of what was then geographically known; it is performed literally on Neptune's element in a location where such a myth has previously been unheard of; each of the participants faces an actual survival rate that is alarmingly low; and the context of the masque concerns an indigenous culture that is not really understood in terms of its own cultural integrity. In addition, the performance is scripted with the actual reunified exploration party as its cast. The huge backdrop is entirely natural; the native onlookers are perfectly appropriate, even necessary, extras; all props are utilitarian; and the occasion for performance is immediately practical. For a moment, the ideal has become the real. It is even noted in the text that Poutrincourt, unprompted, draws his sword in salute as the Tritons deliver their messages of praise. He thus performs seamlessly his real/fictional role: pre-eminence. Like a monarch pausing to view and be viewed in royal entry at the gates of a great Renaissance city, de Poutrincourt negotiates power and jurisdiction. Just as his prestige is celebrated, so the hopes and expectations of all concerned are reemphasized. But here the fiction is more obviously invested with immediate fact. And the drawn sword—again ideal, real, and symbolic—is a prop that signifies both power and protection. Just as it is feared for its violence, the sword is also revered by the Europeans because it is shaped as a cross; and both associations will combine to transform this new world in ways scarcely

yet imaginable. Indeed the cross as navigational point on significant headlands was already transforming the cartography of the continent at the same time as it asserted European religious symbology.

Within the play, the Tritons deliver conventional monologues of exaltation. Their appeals to mythology are keyed throughout to the physical surroundings of the metatheatrical situation in which they perform. Surroundings such as "these places," "these coasts here," and "this new world" (40), are indicative aspects of landscape reality, features that are literalized even as they are pointed out and spoken of. Another literal feature of this masque is the military obedience of the Tritons, who really are the men of Poutrincourt and loyal sons of France. Remarkably, they call their master "*adesquides*,"—friend—which Lescarbot translates in the margin of his text as "Mot de Sauvage qui signifie Ami." But the festivity of the occasion constantly overrides its formality, even as the Tritons sing nationalistic paeans to contemporary French imperialism:

France, you have reason
 To praise the devotion
 Of your children whose courage
 Reveals itself more grandly in this age
 Than ever it did in past centuries.
 They are keenly interested
 In trumpeting your praises abroad
 To the most unknown of peoples,
 And in engraving your immortal destiny
 Throughout the mortal world. (40)

In enacting these lines, the "children" of France literally and joyously perform the political pride and approval of which they speak. Their praises are broken up nicely by the comic lines of the fifth Triton, who makes teasing innuendoes about Neptune's sex life. His part is scripted in a thick, humorous Gascon dialect (actually, according to Doucette, "*occitan*, the language of the Languedoc area of southern France" [*Theatre* 5]) with a sailor's knack for juicy innuendo; and he doubtless performs with all the appropriate salacious gestures:

Hear ye what I wish to say:
 That old fellow, Neptune,
 Bragged loudly the other day
 Admiring himself like a real ladies' man.

—Once I made love
 And kissed a young wench
 Who was very polite and gentle;
 I frequented her company every day— (40-41)

The literal English translation can barely approximate the inelegance and lighthearted crudity implied in the original. But Poutrincourt—military officer and titled gentleman—would no doubt appreciate the jolly, raucous patriotism of his men, their theatrical welcome, and their validation of his continuing command.

The six Tritons bearing greeting are followed by four Indians bearing gifts. Instead of conveying favor, however, these gifts betoken servitude. The first Indian "*offers a quarter of an elk or moose*" (41), pledging his skill as homage to French domination. He even bequeaths his own hunting territory; as he puts it:

Hoping that this province
 Will flourish in piety,
 In civil customs, and in everything
 Which is of service in establishing
 That which is gracious
 And rests in Royal governance. (41)

This is followed by beaver skins from the second Indian who is likewise accommodatingly obedient:

Here is the hand, the bow and the arrow
 Which have inflicted the mortal wound
 On this animal whose skin
 Should serve (Great Sagamos)
 As a warm coat for your Highness. (42)

In each instance the Indian gifts represent the practical values of sustenance, comfort, and allegiance. But the third Indian offers cultural material of aesthetic significance. This is "Matachiaz," according to the text: "*sashes and bracelets made by the hand of his mistress*" (42). Lescarbot had admired this wampum since his first meeting with natives earlier in 1606 (*History*, II, 309). And it is valued here, too, in terms of mutual artistic appreciation. The third Indian is in fact a Frenchman who is playing an Indian role in French. Culture is appropriated and mutual-

ized. Yet the political posture of the natives here and throughout is gratitude, and the Europeans must reinforce this position in order to maintain cultural hegemony.

The Europeans know well, however, that social, political, and aesthetic assertion is relative. Instead of airy fantasies, the moose meat and beaver skins provide food and warmth—basic and necessary requirements for survival for which the Frenchmen must make application to the very people whom they seek to dominate. What the natives had given in reality to ensure survival, is now donated aesthetically to ensure pleasure. The matachiaz, too, unites both systems in an aesthetic and practical way. The variegated beadwork, fashioned by the hand of an Indian "mistress," demonstrates the international power of Cupid; but the third Indian's Petrarchan language of imperial takeover also contains special relevance:

It is not only in France
That Cupid reigns,
But also in New France.
As with you he also lights
His firebrand here; and with his flames
He scorches our poor souls
And plants there his flag. (42)

The "pleasures" of cultural appropriation are painful. Power is transferred between Micmac and Frenchman through literal matachiaz and figurative love. Europeans will wear the native accessories, just as the natives will feel the heat of European expansionist ideals. Devotion and reliance are signalled, mutual feeling asserted.

The third Indian is as much a tormented lover as any lonesome and homesick Frenchman present, as he gently explains:

Therefore, accept gladly—
For the love of my mistress—
This present made with such affection
Which I offer you;
For she is now in distress
And will not be happy
Unless I tell her promptly
Of the kindness which your Highness has done me. (42)

Significantly, conjugal love must be preceded by political devotion; native libido is deemphasized in favor of gratitude. The verses undoubtedly project a measure of male European sexual desire. But the natives, just as undoubtedly, understand such desire. Within this masque, a human capacity for feeling and desire is as much a shared emotion as is the human requirement for celebration. European institutional securities such as family, church, and polity are represented with one eye on the native audience and their edification. Lescarbot, in his *History*, often notes what he considers to be their false religious precepts and crude personal interactions. Still, there is room also for praise in the instance of Bituani, a native who won his bride through extra hunting and fishing. Lescarbot reports the episode and comments thus: "By this act we see that the two greatest points in matters of marriage are observed among these peoples, guided solely by the law of nature: to wit, the authority of parents and the duty of husbands to work" (*History* II, 248). Historically the French were not reticent to mix sexually with the natives; a measure of non-racist cultural miscegenation was inevitable. Yet the native cultural ethic is clearly inferior in the minds of the Europeans. Lescarbot, in a later falling out between friends, even attempted to discredit Champlain in France by accusing him of superstitious belief in the Indian Gougou monster (*History*, II, 172-76).⁴

Still, the generosity of the natives—legendary since the first report of Columbus—is noted often by Lescarbot in his *History* (see esp. II, 322, 324, 352), and celebrated here in his masque. Indeed he can barely restrain his admiration for their noble simplicity in comparison with European mores: "Oh, happy race! yea, a thousand-fold more happy than those who here [ie. in Europe] make us bow down to them, had they but the knowledge of God and of their salvation" (*History*, II, 325). Temper this idealism with the practical reportage with which Lescarbot begins his *History*, and we realize the fundamental respect involved:

To put it briefly, they have courage, fidelity, generosity, and humanity, and their hospitality is so innate and praiseworthy that they receive among them every man who is not an enemy. They are not simpletons like many people over here; they speak with much judgment and good sense; . . . So that if we commonly call them Savages, the word is abusive and unmerited, for they are anything but that. (I, 32-3)

But, just as in France, there are exceptions, and the fourth Indian tries in vain to apologize for having nothing to provide. Having relied on the vagaries of Fortune, he returns empty-handed from the hunt. Here, even failure is contained within the European mythology of Fortune; and it is within this mythology that the native now finds himself. He even abdicates hunting to the followers of Diana—"May Diana in her forests/Cherish those whom she wants" (42)—promising to switch allegiance from Fortune to Neptune by going fishing. Within the context of the masque, it is appropriate that he turn to Neptune's element for sustenance rather than to some ill-defined native spirit. There is no going back. The native words do not exist to accommodate European myth, a linguistic fact to which Lescarbot is quite sensitive: "They have no words which can represent the mysteries of our religion, and it would be impossible to translate even the Lord's Prayer into their language save by paraphrase" (*History* II, 179-80). Besides, Neptune's masque makes clear that the white man's mythology is the mythology of progress, personal success, and cultural power. The rather free translation of the Fourth Indian's speech by R. K. Hicks catches the cultural confusion as well as the variation in language and dialect that was provided earlier by the Gascon:

Fourth Indian, carrying a harpoon:

Red man bring no gift—no luck, bad hunting—Waw—beat woods all day—no moose—no deer—change business—give up hunting—Waw—follow great chief Neptune—go fishing—Waw—bring fish tomorrow for white chief—me hungry—men hungry—white chief give food—Waw—Caracona—grub—Waw. (222)

Thus the oral native forms are inscribed, just as the Micmac language was soon to be accorded inscribed symbols by French priests. And an inscribed culture is one that can be read, studied, interpreted, even parodied—ultimately one that can be transformed by a culture with older books and literary provenance. The lines, as well as the aping of "uncivilized" mannerisms, are calculated to get a laugh at the same time as they reinforce the comforting stereotype of Indian subservience. Absurd mimesis is the character note for the extroverted Frenchman who performed the role. The performance itself is a lesson by bad example for the Indians in the audience who witness this parody of themselves. And yet everyone in attendance—French and Micmac alike—will reintegrate

within an actual feast of celebration ready to be consumed at the end of the show.

The feast is redolent of both thanksgiving and reward. Leonard Doucette is eloquent in noting the possibilities of a distinctly Canadian celebration here: "November 14, 1606 is a date that could annually have been celebrated as a more apposite Thanksgiving than our present one, one richer and older than the largely legendary sharing of the harvest by Pilgrim and Indian in that land of the Armouchiquois from which Poutrincourt and his men had felt so fortunate to return" (*Theatre* 8). Lescarbot notes Poutrincourt's gratitude to the cast, and his invitation to the Indians to join his men in the sharing of bread within the walls of the fort. This bread offering—"caraconas," in the Micmac language—was customary with the early explorers and their native hosts, as recounted by Lescarbot in his *History*. He witnessed bread-giving at Canso prior to his arrival at Port Royal in 1606, and makes note of the Indians' dire efforts in making leavened bread on their own (II, 282). For one as conscientiously religious as Lescarbot, the obvious symbolism of the Christian bread of life would no doubt be operative here. But he is never overbearing on the topic. And the song of celebration that follows closely is a secular four-part song adapted from the popular contemporary air "La Petite Galiotte de France":

Loyal Neptune, grant us
Security against your waves,
And grant that we will all be able
To meet again in France one day. (43)

The entire cast joins in on this finale which expresses the danger and excitement of new world exploration at the same time that it evokes sobering concerns of French nostalgia and cultural uncertainty. For participants such as Champlain and Louis Hébert, who founded and propagated the Quebec colony, there would ultimately be no return to France.

To conclude his masque, Lescarbot reports the sounding of trumpets and shooting of cannon, with their ensuing echo of presence and power. Against the enormous unknown backdrop of the new world, such soundings would assert martial authority. They are the standard military symbol of greeting; and yet the closest European neighbors were in

Florida, thousands of miles to the south. The purpose here is to celebrate the French military grasp of the area, and to accommodate the awe of the natives for whom the thunder of cannon had been especially frightening in Cartier's time. But the roar of cannon had become a favored formality among the natives by 1606. Lescarbot even notes the insistence of the Micmac chief concerning the salute of cannon fire:

Membertou was very desirous that the honour should be done unto him of shooting off our cannon when he arrived, because he saw that the same was done to the French captains in such a case, saying that this was due unto him, since he was a Sagamos. (*History*, III, 214)

Doubtless the celebration had been performed on this day for the Indian sagamos prior to the arrival of the white one. The excitement of occasion deserves public announcement and political visibility. Neptune confronts De Poutrincourt who confronts Membertou. Power is transferred. Gratitude is forthcoming. Through this theatrical interaction, the Europeans both create and appropriate power.

Lescarbot mentions the power of the echo at Port Royal in his *History* (II, 313), and he focuses on it here in his script, noting "*the cannons boom from all sides and thunder as if Proserpine were in labour: this is caused by the multiplicity of echoes which the hills send back to each other lasting for more than a quarter of an hour*" (43). Such otherworld reverberations seemed a fascination for him as well in his earlier poem on the departure of his fellow explorers:

Do you admire loquacious Echo's rhymes?
Here Echo can reply full thirty times,
For when the cannon's thunder outward sounds
Full thirty times the reverberant boom rebounds
As loud as that which Megaera might reverse
To overthrow this mighty universe. ("Farewell" 48-49)

It is fitting and somewhat ominous that the simile of the jealous fury Megaera should anticipate the birthing agony of Proserpine referred to by Lescarbot in the cannonade that concludes *The Theatre of Neptune*. Classical references stabilize the immediacy of scripted action: male voices raised in song, stirring trumpet blasts of advancement and retreat, reverberating explosions of cannon fire—these are the background

accompaniment for a new world perceived as untamed and hostile, but also one in which the French now consider themselves resident. And the relationship does reverse itself: aesthetically, the French performers are Indians; literally, the Indian roles are performed by Frenchmen. Natives and whites in the role of audience will merge with the principal masque performers in the feast that follows. The show goes on. And at this table, the Europeans will be the hosts. The mythic and the realistic have been merged to produce the cultural material of the script through an image of hegemonic interaction in which the Europeans predominate.

Yet the power consciousness of *The Theatre of Neptune* speaks as much to an immediate sense of gratification as it does to a newly-established cultural ethic. The Sieur De Poutrincourt is met at the fortress gate by "a companion of a jolly disposition" (43)—"un compagnon de gaillarde humeur"—who has dinner on his mind:

Pay attention then grillers, waiters, cooks,
 Kitchen hands, bakers, makers of fricasse, tavern keepers;
 Turn the pots, plates and kitchen upside down!
 Let's give to each of these gentlemen his full quart. (43)

The physical purpose of the masque is prelude to an actual feast of celebration, and the "companion" above follows in the same comic line as the fifth Triton and the fourth Indian. His words trail off into further quips, puns and nonsense verse in the French original that betray the features of an antimasque in a more conventional entertainment. In fact *The Theatre of Neptune* is an even grander prelude to the renowned Order of Good Cheer, originated by Champlain at Port Royal that same winter of 1606. Here, it can honestly be said that celebration ensured not just aesthetic pleasure but actual survival.

And *The Theatre of Neptune* can be thanked for setting the mood overall. It is a literary artifact that celebrates survival and power through a dramatized myth shared by Frenchmen and Natives alike. For the Micmacs, as audience and compliant participants, it presents a visual lesson in cultural dominance and celebration. The Indians are absorbed in mutual festivity. The French both create and benefit from this mutualized cultural aspect. For the European reader of the published text, the verse presents reassurance through the dramatization of assuming cultural hegemony in the new world. The play thus encodes sweeping and

unprecedented social energy: new-world exploration and endurance, European/Native acculturation, cultural hegemony through the assertion of dominant myth. Just as the masque celebrates a community of "newness," it does so under the aegis of the French King's motto: *Duo protegit unus*, One protects two; and this is precisely the strategy of French colonialism. *The Theatre of Neptune* provides a generous cultural and aesthetic experience, but the message is still the same: this is an exercise of power. Its author has both a practical and metaphorical purpose in mind. And the performance is effective in both its verse and its intention—perhaps literally in providing the escapism that every such masque-like entertainment sought to achieve in the Renaissance. "Literally" might seem an extravagant intensifier here, but Lescarbot *did* leave a comfortable law practice in France to embark on his voyage of discovery with Poutrincourt and Champlain; as Lescarbot himself put it: "to explore the district with my own eyes, whereto my will was drawn, and to flee an evil world" (*History II*, 286-87). For the duration of *The Theatre of Neptune*, at least, he could suspend the old, "evil" world and indulge the uncrowded, sustaining, primarily optimistic blandishments of the new.

NOTES

1. Unless noted otherwise, I will quote Lescarbot's play from the line-by-line translation of Eugene and Renate Benson. I also make use of the French original as edited by Hannah Fournier. The first English translation of the play was the stylized one by Harriette Taber Richardson. Another less-than-accurate translation is by R. K. Hicks. On the early Spanish drama and its relationship to Lescarbot's play, see Meserve, 11-15.
2. I refer to and quote from W. L. Grant's translation. Lescarbot's *Histoire* (excluding *Les Muses de la Nouvelle-France*) was originally translated into English by Pierre Erondelle in 1609. On Lescarbot himself the best English biographies are by H. P. Biggar and Rene Beaudry.
3. On the history of early cultural interaction see the works edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn and Bruce G. Trigger, as well as those by Bailey, Dickason and Pagden, and the introductory material to L. F. S. Upton's *Micmacs and Colonists*. On the issue of historic land claims, see Green and Dickason.
4. For a fuller (and somewhat slanted) account of the controversy, see Armstrong's Appendix V (284-89).

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